Mississippi Oral History Program

Hurricane Katrina Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Harry Hoyle McDonald Sr.

Interviewers: Johanna Stork and Chrystal Bowen-Swan

Volume 863
2007
Biography

Born on December 31, 1933, in Lumberton, Mississippi, Harry McDonald grew up on a farm, doing chores with his siblings. His parents’ families were educators, farmers and businesspeople. Mr. McDonald attended Lumberton Consolidated Schools and The University of Southern Mississippi where he earned a BS in accounting. Additionally he did graduate work at New York University. He served in the United States Army, making grade E7. He married Jacquelyn Greenough on May 21, 1956, in Escatawpa, Mississippi. Mr. McDonald has been a radiological safety engineer at Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula, Mississippi, from 1957 to 1993. He has been active in the Boy Scouts of America, becoming a Scoutmaster; he has been active in Nature and Land Trust, in Audubon Society, in the Rotary Club, and the Weight Control Engineering Society. Awards earned have been all available adult Boy Scout awards, Rotarian of the Year, United Way Male Volunteer for two different years, among many others, and he is a Master Gardener. He enjoys historical research and writing, gardening, and advocating for cemeteries to be taken care of. At the time of this interview Mr. McDonald was writing a book on Gulf Coast cemeteries, including who is buried and when they were buried. He is a member of the Methodist faith. He and his wife are both from early Mississippi pioneer families; they have eight generations buried in family cemeteries. They are the parents of one son, Harry H. McDonald Jr.
Table of Contents

Attachment to Mississippi Gulf Coast ................................................................. 2
Neighborhood prior to Katrina ............................................................................... 3, 5
Experiencing Hurricane Katrina ............................................................................ 3, 11
Community traditions ......................................................................................... 4
Community problems prior to Katrina ................................................................. 5
Community strengths prior to Katrina ................................................................. 6
Politicians ............................................................................................................... 6
Initial awareness of Katrina .................................................................................. 7
Evacuation ............................................................................................................. 7
Preparing for Katrina ......................................................................................... 7
As Katrina approached ........................................................................................ 8
Hurricane Camille ............................................................................................. 9, 22
FEMA .................................................................................................................. 12
Volunteers .......................................................................................................... 13
Days following Katrina ....................................................................................... 14
Delivering necessities to needy .......................................................................... 14
Cleaning house ................................................................................................. 15
Help from Boy Scouts ....................................................................................... 15
Churches’ roles following Katrina .................................................................... 16
FEMA trailers ..................................................................................................... 16
Scarcity of grocery stores ................................................................................... 18
Children of Katrina ............................................................................................ 18
Charettes and rebuilding ................................................................................... 19
Building codes .................................................................................................. 19
Hopes and fears for future .................................................................................. 20
Hopes for rebuilding .......................................................................................... 21
Historical Preservation Commission and opposition ....................................... 21
Hurricanes Frederic and Georges .................................................................. 23
Childhood ............................................................................................................ 23
United States Veterans of War and Katrina evacuation .................................... 25
AN ORAL HISTORY

with

HARRY HOYLE McDonald SR.

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Harry Hoyle McDonald Sr. and is taking place on February 22, 2007. The interviewers are Johanna Stork and Chrystal Bowen-Swan.

Bowen-Swan: This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Hurricane Katrina Oral History Project done in conjunction with the University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada. The interview is with Mr. Harry McDonald, and it is taking place on February 22, 2007, at 1:45 p.m. in Moss Point, at the Moss Point Library in Mississippi. The interviewers are Johanna Stork and Chrystal Bowen-Swan. And first of all, I’d like to thank you, Mr. McDonald, for taking the time to speak with us today, and I’d like to get some background information about you, which is usually what we do in our oral history interviews. So I’m going to ask you for the record, could you please state your name?

McDonald: My name is Harry H. McDonald Sr.

Stork: And for the record, in case all labels are lost or damaged, how do you spell your name?


Stork: Great. And when were you born?

McDonald: Nineteen thirty-three.

Stork: And where were you born?

McDonald: In a rural area of Mississippi, Pearl River County, near the town of Lumberton.

Bowen-Swan: OK. And for the record, what was your father’s name?

McDonald: James Mason McDonald Sr.

Bowen-Swan: And your mother’s maiden name?

McDonald: Danley.

Stork: And where did you grow up?
McDonald: I grew up near Lumberton, Mississippi.

Stork: And how long have you lived on the Mississippi Gulf Coast?

McDonald: I’ve been down here since 1955.

Bowen-Swan: So how many generations in your family have lived on the Gulf Coast?

McDonald: My immediate family is the only two generations, but my wife’s family have been here since 1815, which is probably eight generations.

Bowen-Swan: And why were you living there, or why was your wife’s family living there?

McDonald: Why my wife’s family was living here is probably they didn’t have any better sense. You know, they were immigrants that came here.

Stork: Whereabouts did they emigrate from?

McDonald: Germany. Why I came down here was because my wife was from here; it was a better place for making a living, in South Mississippi, than any other location. You go where there’s a good income, and it was a lot better here than it was at Hattiesburg, where The University of Southern Mississippi is, at that time.

Bowen-Swan: And did you come from this area to go to school in Hattiesburg?

McDonald: Oh, we, my wife and I, met in school, and I was in service. And we married, and we came back here to live after we got out of the service.

Stork: Describe your attachment to the region. What does it mean to you?

McDonald: It’s a historically significant part of South Mississippi. It’s got a good culture; it’s fairly well preserved. It’s a melting pot of people, so you don’t have a lot of class differences, a lot of different societies. And actually it’s a beautiful place to live. There’s not many places that have century-old oaks like we do. You know 75 percent of our county is water, and water is beautiful. The wildlife is great. Plant life here is just wonderful.

Bowen-Swan: And where was your neighborhood?

McDonald: I live in the part of Moss Point that’s called Escatawpa. It’s urban; we have hard-surfaced roads, but we don’t have sidewalks. We really might say that we live out of town, almost, because it’s that sparsely populated.
**Stork:** And can you describe your neighborhood before Hurricane Katrina?

**McDonald:** Well, we were a tree-covered area, and we were very quiet. Now we can see lights everywhere, and everyone was impacted the same way in my neighborhood by the storm. And our impact was from water and not primarily from wind. We were water.

**Stork:** Did you stay in your home during Hurricane Katrina?

**McDonald:** Yes, we did.

**Stork:** Can you describe that experience for us?

**McDonald:** It’s hard to believe this, but we hardly knew the storm was going on. Our house is well-built. It’s well insulated, and it’s almost where you don’t hear anything’s going on outside. The winds, you just didn’t notice them. In fact, we hardly knew that the storm was there. We had very little rain; it was only after—this was during the night part when most of the winds came through. And during the daylight hours when the water came in, we had no water for a long time. And you could hardly believe that there was a storm because the hummingbirds were feeding, and we were sitting on the front porch watching them. And I looked across the highway, and there was water two or three hundred yards away. And it was just a trickle of water, and I kept watching it. And then we made the decision that we’d better move some antique furniture up high and computers and things like this. So we moved everything that could be moved in case we did get water.

**Bowen-Swan:** I just didn’t really understand like why you mentioned the hummingbirds. Did you mean that because you saw them—

**McDonald:** They were feeding like mad.

**Bowen-Swan:** They were normal? They were just acting normal?

**McDonald:** Oh, yes. Yeah, they were just darting in and out and feeding, and we have several feeders, and we always like to—early in the morning we drink our coffee and watch the hummingbirds. And that particular morning, the hummingbirds were there. And I said, “Great.” You know, maybe—

**Bowen-Swan:** Was that normal? Did you normally see them?

**McDonald:** Oh, yes. It was a normal thing because every morning they were there, and it just—I said, “Well, maybe we missed the storm.” And at that time, you had no communication, like your television, because the electricity was off. But we had a radio, and we were in contact with the weather buoy; the Coast Guard was keeping people informed as to where the tidal surge and where the winds were going and
things like this. But other than that, it really wasn’t that bad. I have been in worse storms here.

**Bowen-Swan:** Yeah, you guys are used to storms down here, right?

**McDonald:** We’ve had a number, but this is the first time that we’ve had water.

**Stork:** Was the water, did it rise right up in your neighborhood? Was it in the streets and things in your neighborhood?

**McDonald:** It covered everything. I don’t believe there was a single residence in my entire side of the city that did not get water in their home. And it was not like this; it just oozed in.

**Bowen-Swan:** Um-hm. And was it affected by wind, too?

**McDonald:** Probably, when it came up the river and into the lakes, it was driven in by wind. And then it got so much water, it had to get out of its embankments. So it just spread out through the meadowland.

**Bowen-Swan:** Are there any traditions that you carry on in your community? For example Mardi Gras or St. Patrick’s Day or parades or any boatbuilding or music, or any sort of thing like that?

**McDonald:** Well, we have a soapbox derby here.

**Bowen-Swan:** Soapbox derby? What’s that?

**McDonald:** It’s little vehicles that the boys and girls get in that you come down the hill. It’s where the momentum is done—there’s no mechanism there to make it go except—

**Bowen-Swan:** Gravity?

**McDonald:** —coming down the hill, gravity. And we’re the only place, I believe, within several miles—I’ll say hundreds of miles—that have a soapbox derby. It’s a big event here in Moss Point. And then we do what we call the Falderal(?), which is a celebration where we decorate the main part of downtown with pumpkin lanterns before Halloween. And then we do the conversion at Thanksgiving and then at Christmastime. And we have lots of people who come and see what we’re doing. We make snowmen out of pumpkins.

**Bowen-Swan:** What was it called? I missed it.

**McDonald:** It’s called Falderal. And it’s a group of senior citizens that put this on every year, but we started it here in Moss Point, and it’s spread all over everywhere.
People are doing it. We put out bales of hay, and we put out the pumpkins. And we don’t grow pumpkins here. We have to get them from somewhere else. And then we plant things like sunflowers, and we do a lot of artificial things. And we also celebrate our birds. We have the Audubon Center here, and this past year at Falderal, we saluted the Audubon Center coming here. And we had birds cut out of plywood and painted and positioned and all sort of stuff like that all downtown. And we had a sculpture made out of driftwood by an artist that brought in a lot of attention. We’ve got a beautiful waterfront downtown. And then they have Christmas on the River, here, which is a parade on the river, of boats, with all the Christmas decorations. I’m not into Mardi Gras; I’m not knocking religion. It’s a Catholic celebration; I grew up very Protestant, and we did not do things like that. However, down here, it’s an accepted thing, but where I grew up, it was not a thing that you got into. And I just don’t—I’ve never gotten excited about it. And then I’m a master naturalist, which is getting out and working with kids, learning their plants, their animals, their birds. And I’m a Scoutmaster and work with kids, and we do a lot of camping, things like that. And there are a lot of other things that go on in this part of Mississippi, like the antique automobiles, driving them up and down the street, you know, on certain days. Parades are a big thing here. Any time there’s a parade, they’re going to be throwing candy and stuff out, that type of thing. And lots of people get excited about it, and it’s good. But I’m beyond that age.

Bowen-Swan: What are your most vivid memories of your community before Hurricane Katrina?

McDonald: I think, our beautiful trees. We were fortunate. We have over six hundred century-old oaks in Moss Point. We’re one of the few places that did not lose their trees, but losing other types of trees where you’ve got more open area, it left it looking like it was sort of naked, when you can see your neighbor’s lights, when you were not used to seeing them. You’ve got more exposure now. But I think that the people who lost their homes on the waterfront, it took away some of the beauty of the area, but they’re coming back.

Stork: What were your community’s problems and strengths prior to Hurricane Katrina?

McDonald: I don’t know if you want to hear this or not.

Bowen-Swan: We sure do.

McDonald: Poor drainage, quality of water, drinking water.

Bowen-Swan: Not very good?

McDonald: No. Poor sewer system, littering, inadequate police protection, which I think is everywhere. But that was the major things.
Stork: And then what would you list as some of the strengths?

McDonald: Some of the strengths?

Stork: Yeah, some of the better aspects.

McDonald: Well, we’ve got a great library system, which is county-wide. And it’s a great institution, and it provides a lot of opportunity for all ages. Our churches are great, and we have plenty of them. Many of the service clubs are very effective, like your Woman’s Club, your Garden Club, your Rotary Club, things like that; they’re strong.

Bowen-Swan: Anything else you wanted to add onto that?

McDonald: On the strengths?

Bowen-Swan: Yeah.

McDonald: I can’t really say that we’ve got any real good strengths. We really have gone down the last few years. We don’t have the youth programs available for the kids and things like that. And I’m older, too, and we don’t have a, what I would say, a good senior citizen opportunity here for the older people. We don’t have the housing that older people are needing and things like that. We’re so spread out. Transportation would be a big problem also. But that’s all I can say. But yet we’re much more fortunate than a lot of other places because people care about each other, and they make up for those things that you are deficient in.

Stork: What was your opinion of local, state, and federal politicians prior to Hurricane Katrina?

McDonald: When you speak of federal, are you speaking of our senators and our congressmen?

Stork: Um-hm.

McDonald: Well, we have great senators and congressmen from the State of Mississippi, and they have really done everything in their power to provide opportunities for us down here. We’re in the city, so we don’t benefit from the county officials a great deal; however, I know most of them, and they are supportive on those things that they can support us on. Our City, I’m not too pleased with what they were doing before the storm or after the storm, and a lot of it is due to the fact that there’s not enough money to do all the things that need to be done. And that may be the big reason why no one is satisfied with what’s going on.

Bowen-Swan: And what was your opinion about the politicians or the officials after Katrina? Did it change at all?
McDonald: Well, (laughter) some of them might not like what I’m going to say, but I saw a lot of apathy on all levels. You see a lot of people in different areas of the government not knowing what the other one is doing, and there have been a lot of conflicts because of lack of communication. And we just have not seen real progress.

Stork: How has the storm changed the way that you think about your community?

McDonald: Here again, I was disappointed in people themselves. I was raised where if you had a problem, you tried to solve it. And a lot of people just sat down and waited for somebody else to come and solve their problem. And that was my disappointment was in people not helping themselves when they were capable of helping themselves.

Bowen-Swan: How and when did you hear about the storm?

McDonald: When you have lived on the Gulf Coast, you listen every day to the weather. When the weatherman tells you that there is a circulation two thousand miles away, you immediately start tracking that circulation, and you have a map that you put it on. And you plot it every time they give you the coordinates, and you keep up with it, and you make your plans based upon what you see and what the weather officials are telling you. So you really know that you’re going to be hit directly or indirectly at some point. So that’s why you make preparations. And we are taught, or supposedly taught, to be prepared all the time for hurricanes. At my house, we have hurricane boxes with what we need. If we need batteries, we replace them. We check the generator out all the time, the portable stoves, everything that you need to use while you are down. But you make preparations; you don’t wait till the day before the storm gets here.

Bowen-Swan: So what, when, and how did you hear about evacuation for Hurricane Katrina?

McDonald: The only evacuation that I heard was the evacuation that came over the television from the weather people that said it’s recommended that people who lived in low-lying areas or adjacent to water, streams of water, to make preparations. I really never heard any evacuation orders. There were not really any given. I think that’s left up to the individual to make that decision.

Stork: So what was your reaction to all the weather information that you were getting, and how did you prepare for the hurricane?

McDonald: Well, I just simply checked out all my equipment. We each one did pack a suitcase with the clothing that we needed. We also had a food box that was packed in case we didn’t evacuate, and I had also checked all the gas containers, to make sure that I had sufficient gas to operate the generators and also in the event that we did need to evacuate, that there was enough gas in automobiles to relocate. And that’s the first
thing I always do; I keep those cars and the truck topped off with—make certain that there’s—because when you’re on an evacuation route, there’s no gas available. And that was the big problem that people had. They didn’t prepare. I prepared, and we made certain that all the screens on the windows were intact, the windows were locked. We also made sure that we had sufficient cash on hand if we needed to evacuate that we could not have a problem with lack of funds. Another thing that we did, all of the frozen food that was in the deep freeze, we thawed out, and we cooked where it could be used rather than go to waste. And I no longer keep a deep freeze full of food because when we have a storm, we’re normally out of electricity for a number of days, and you lose what you have in there. But we make certain that we don’t have that. And we have not only our own home, but we have to maintain the one that adjoins us because my wife’s sister lives there, and she’s handicapped. And we can’t do anything; that’s the one reason we could not leave because we could not relocate her, and we have to get that residence also in shape, make certain that everything is secure, that she has water. And that’s another thing is getting sufficient water to carry you through several weeks, and we do that.

**Stork:** So when would you start making these preparations? I mean—

**McDonald:** I do it all the time.

**Stork:** All the time?

**McDonald:** All the time. It’s not just waiting for a dot to get on the map saying we’ve got a depression out there. We keep a supply ready all the time.

**Stork:** For example, like when, this time, did you decide, “We’ve got to eat all the food in the freezer?” Because that would take a few days.

**McDonald:** About ten days before, I started thawing stuff out, and I didn’t have a whole lot in there. But we thawed it out, and I went ahead and cooked it, and we put it in the containers, and I refroze it.

**Bowen-Swan:** So you knew that the storm was coming ten days before it actually hit?

**McDonald:** Any time they tell us a storm is in the Gulf, we think it’s going to get us. You know when you live here, you just have to do those things. It’s another sense that you have.

**Stork:** So describe your experience as the hurricane approached.

**McDonald:** Well, as long as the electricity was on, I was keeping up with it fairly well. And then also on my computer, I have a weather station, and I was keeping up. Actually, the computer provided a great deal more information than anything else did. And you go in there and feed numbers into it, and it can tell you just exactly what the strength of the eye, walls of the eye, and if it’s gerrymandering, or if it’s staying on a
steady course, and the projections. They give you this wide-angle thing, and you look at those things, and you, as an individual, has to say, “Well, we’re going to get forty-five-miles-an-hour wind here. I’m not going to risk getting out on the highway and be fighting people.” And if you haven’t been in one, you haven’t evacuated, that is the biggest chaos, is getting out of here, that you’ve ever seen. It’s awful. I could not even back out of my driveway if I had to for several hours because of traffic, and I live on a side street. On my little side street, they were like this, trying to bypass a red light to get onto the major highways. And the traffic and the way people react is the worst part of any storm preparation. It is. You want to take your machine gun.

(laughter)

**Stork:** So how often would you say in the few days before the storm, how often do you think you would be checking your computer for updates?

**McDonald:** Every hour.

**Stork:** Every hour. And how long would you be on the computer for?

**McDonald:** Probably ten minutes at a time. Keeping up with the weather is very important. And when you have a family and you know you can’t move, and if you do move, you’ve got to get some physical help to move the sister-in-law, I have to keep up with it.

**Stork:** And I don’t usually check the weather on the computer. Is it really detailed weather maps?

**McDonald:** Oh, yes.

**Stork:** And you can see how the system is coming in?

**McDonald:** They give you the same thing that you see on TV. I don’t know if you’ve ever watched it, but they give you the center of the storm and any variation. If it turns one degree, you know how far out the winds—it gives you a lot of information, and what the tidal surges are going to be.

**Bowen-Swan:** So why did you decide to stay, and what was most important in your decision to stay?

**McDonald:** We’ve only evacuated once, and that was for the other big storm.

**Bowen-Swan:** Camille?

**McDonald:** Camille. OK. Everyone had left at Camille, and we were the only ones left, my wife and son and I. And I was working for Ingalls Shipbuilding. I was one of the last people to be released from the shipyard. Everyone else had evacuated from the Coast that wanted to evacuate. And my wife’s grandmother was in her late
eighties or early nineties, and we had made arrangements to have her relocated, my wife had, during the time that I was at work. And we got home, and her parents and all her brothers and sisters had already evacuated; so we were by ourselves. And so I called my parents because they were real elderly, and I told them that we were coming to get them to move them further inland.

Bowen-Swan: Um-hm. Where were your parents living?

McDonald: They were at Lumberton.

Bowen-Swan: OK. Is that north of here?

McDonald: It’s straight up the state; so whatever way that is. And so we went to get them to relocate, and they had made no preparation at all. They didn’t intend to relocate, but we hadn’t been there but a few minutes when the gusts, well, the wind—I told them they’d better get out. And we made it about four miles when the trees blocked us in, and we went into my sister’s, and we stayed there. And that was a big decision on me not going back was having to go through that because that was much worse than what Katrina was here.

Bowen-Swan: What, Camille?

McDonald: Camille was much worse, in a much smaller area, but if you got into the path of the winds, it was much worse. And we got into “Tornado Alley,” and there were many, many tornadoes and things like that. And it was very scary, but everybody has to make up their own mind. Also, we felt comfortable because across the street from me is a huge church, and we were invited to come there if we needed to go in a shelter. And it was full of local people. So we really weren’t worried about it, down deep.

Stork: How did it compare from Camille to Katrina, how you got your information and the quality of the information and that kind of thing?

McDonald: On Camille, you didn’t know. Communication was very, very poor. Very, very poor unless you were part of, I guess I would say, a government. What information you got on TV was very, very limited. You didn’t have the constant update of weather, so you really didn’t know, and that’s why a lot of people were killed in Camille is that they didn’t evacuate in an area that was prone to flood. And we are not prone to flood here, but not knowing is one of the reasons that make you evacuate.

Bowen-Swan: Did the proximity of friends or relatives in communities on higher ground influence your decision to stay?

McDonald: No. My sisters all live on higher land at Lumberton, and they had a lot more damage done to their homes than I had done to mine. And they’re a hundred
miles inland, and I was down here. But they got a lot more of the winds than what we got, and that would have been where we would have gone. We’d have gone up there because it is much higher land. But because of the wind, you’ve got to look—the winds are more—you’ve got to worry about the winds, too. Rising water, a lot of times, you can get up on something high, but wind, you can’t get away from.

Bowen-Swan: Right. Who was with you when you stayed here?

McDonald: My wife and son.

Bowen-Swan: Um-hm. How old’s your son?

McDonald: Forty-five. And he keeps up with the weather, too. That’s one of the things that—he charts everything, and he can tell you when it’s going to rain. And I always ask him what the latest news is.

Bowen-Swan: So could you describe Hurricane Katrina and the aftermath, since you stayed?

McDonald: Well, we did not hear the winds. We saw the water come in, but it was not a big tidal wave. It was just an oozing amount of water that just spread out all over the area. The winds undoubtedly had been fairly strong during the night. We had a large number of trees down, and then when the water came in, those that had been loosened up by the wind, the roots, a lot of them toppled over. Our streets were open where we could get in and out, and our telephone worked. Both the standard phone in the house and my cell phone, and so I was able to communicate. I could get calls out; I couldn’t get calls in. But that’s all I needed to do was make a call out.

Stork: But your electricity was out.

McDonald: The electricity was out; it was out for three days.

Stork: And so for those days you couldn’t have any updates from TV or your computer anymore.

McDonald: We had radio; we still had radio. But when the power was out, the storm was over with. And the sun was out; it was awful hot. Had the generator on, and I put—the TV was on. With a generator, we kept the fans and the TV going.

Stork: And were you watching about how the storm was affecting all the areas around the Coast.

McDonald: But you didn’t get a lot of information from the areas along the Coast. Most of the communication was knocked out. What little bit of information that we could get was almost entertainment-type stuff. As far as knowing what had happened below us in Mississippi or anywhere, that type of information was not really available.
for several days. However, the government people, and I’m saying government—
whoever was responsible, the power companies were in here immediately, and we had
power here when people inland was three and four and five weeks away from getting
power. So we actually didn’t suffer like a lot of people did. Now a lot of people lost
their homes; a lot of people had water in their houses. Don’t get me wrong, now. The
living conditions were horrible; mine wasn’t.

Bowen-Swan: Did you get water in your house?

McDonald: I got water in the sunken den, but the bedrooms and all, the kitchen, none
of that was hurt.

Bowen-Swan: And wind damage, any wind damage?

McDonald: No wind damage, not one—

Stork: Were you stranded in your house, or were you stuck there?

McDonald: Only for about twenty minutes when the water came in. It only stayed
about twenty minutes, and actually I put my boots on, and I walked around because I
had some canoes that had been—someone had come and gotten them in the height of
the storm to rescue people with, and I went and pulled them back in to get them off the
street because the water was probably six or eight inches deep at that time, and it’s
easier to move the canoe in the water than to pick it up. So I went and got my canoes,
and we immediately tore out the carpet and underlayment in the house that got wet,
and we had everything dry and back in operation ourselves in a very short period of
time. I had people calling me, wanting tarpaulins because they knew I had the Scout
troop, and I had quite a few of them. And I did go out like that, and we checked on
the neighbors to see how they all were, and we made certain that our streets were open
where if we had an emergency, we could get to the hospital or whatever we had to do.

Stork: So can you describe for us any experiences you may have had with local,
state, or federal officials?

McDonald: I worked with FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] as a
volunteer for several months, and what we were doing—they called us the (inaudible).
We were identifying the historical points of interest throughout the cities and counties,
Jackson County, and providing FEMA with a list of those things that were historically
significant, which included Indian mounds and cemeteries and homes. And they
really appreciated our work. They said that we did in a short period of time a great
job, and they were going to use what we had done as an example, any natural disaster
from now on because if we could put together what they asked for in the short period
of time that we did, anyone could do it. We were the only county—that included our
Cities—along the Gulf Coast that was able to do it because the people that were
involved in it were not that badly hurt by the storm. And then we all thought getting
right-of-entries to get downed trees and things off of our property, which had to be
done through your City government, and then the federal government paid for removing a lot of the stuff. And they would cancel your right-of-entry for no reason at all, and you’d have to go down and argue with them and find out why.

Bowen-Swan: Your right-of-entries? They would cancel your what?

McDonald: Right-of-entries to come in and remove downed trees and things like this.

Bowen-Swan: OK. Why would they do that?

McDonald: I really have no idea. I was working with FEMA, and I mentioned it to the guy from FEMA. And he said, “What do you mean? They cancelled your right-of-entry?” And I said, “Well, they did.” So he called Atlanta to talk to his boss, and the next day they were there, and they did what they were supposed to do. And then going to FEMA, if you had property damage, you were able to get small grants. The red tape that you had to go through filling out all this paperwork, I think that’s been a—I’ve not done any of it, so I can’t say it was a hardship, but I have seen my neighbors suffer through rejections from both federal, state, and local things. And then we’ve had an awful lot of volunteers here from all over the world that’s been here helping. And I’ve done some coordination work with those people. And we appreciate them all coming down. I think they enjoy our Southern hospitality.

Bowen-Swan: We do. (laughter) I know our group has so far at least. And it’s nice that people from all over the world are getting—even though Hurricane Katrina is obviously a horrible thing, but people all over the world are becoming more knowledgeable about Mississippi and sort of have a little piece of Mississippi—

McDonald: Well, it’s the worst national disaster that’s ever occurred to the United States, and it impacted a lot of people. And so it’s great that our Yankee neighbors helped us. You know, we got to know people. And no matter where you go—I was at Michigan State [University] last summer for a convention, and a guy yelled across the campus at me, and it was a guy I’d met from Wisconsin had come down here, and we had worked with him. And he recognized my kinky hair, you know. And we had a good time chatting about the experiences.

Stork: All the way up in where? Michigan?

McDonald: Michigan State. I went to a convention.

Stork: And he just saw you?

McDonald: Yeah, he saw me; he was at the same convention.

Stork: What a coincidence, eh?
McDonald: Yes, a coincidence, yes. Our churches have been headquarters for people who’ve come here to help us. The Methodist churches have been real strong in providing facilities, and that’s been a big plus for Methodist churches is they’ve been providing accommodations for people to come down, and then they coordinate a lot of helping people out. We go find somebody that needed something done, and we go tell the coordinator at the Dantzler Methodist here in Moss Point was one of the centers. We’d go there and say, “So-and-so on such street needs help.” And they’d send a group out, and a lot of times they’d do the repair and everything at no charge at all. That was the great thing that you saw out of the aftermath was how people from everywhere came to help. And you know, living in a church basement with one shower, and there’s forty people, they were so—I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t do it.

Stork: When was the first time after the hurricane that you kind of saw the parts of your neighborhood or the parts of Moss Point that really had a lot of damage to them?

McDonald: Well, I came into this part of Moss Point the day after the storm because I have my Scout building down the street here, and the Rotary Building; I have both of those buildings. It was the day [of] or the day after the storm, I had gotten a call from a lady that lived across the street, and she said both of my buildings had flooded. And so I wanted to come over and look to see what I needed to do because I had a lot of equipment and stuff in there, and I did not get water in either building. Water came under the buildings, but not into the buildings because the buildings are fairly high up off the ground because we’re in a low area. I did not go into—I just didn’t venture out and look at anything else. I concentrated on finding out where my Scout families were, who needed what, and then I had fifty-two trees down in my yard. I have five acres, and I concentrated on trying to get those things straightened out before I did anything else. And that took quite a bit of time, and then I ended up being on the injured list, so I wasn’t able to do anything. I hurt my back.

Bowen-Swan: Cutting up the trees?

McDonald: After I wore out three chainsaws. When you’re bent over like this, I came down with a back problem, and I was told I couldn’t do anything for a while. But also I’m involved in scouting, and I did go to our big camp, which is inland about a hundred miles. We had fifteen thousand trees down on our reservation, and every building up there was damaged. And so we spent several weekends going up and working with groups that came down to help us. And whatever we could do, we did. I bought groceries for people till I looked like I was their grocery person because a lot of people just didn’t have any preparation at all. And a lot of people couldn’t go to the food places where they were serving food; they just were too elderly or too isolated. So we did a lot of that type of work. We’d find out who needed something, and then we’d have people to come by and said, “Well, we lost our home; we’re moving into a FEMA trailer.” And things like that.

Bowen-Swan: Was your house OK to stay in, or did you have to like leave it for a while?
**McDonald:** Oh, no. We never had to leave anything at all. No, we were in great shape.

**Bowen-Swan:** OK. And did you just clean up your den, yourself, kind of thing?

**McDonald:** We did everything ourselves, and the house next door to us, they had water in their sunken den, and my sister-in-law had water in one bedroom. And my son and I, we took care of her place, also. We were amazed at the little bit of damage that we had, ourselves, compared to where the people who lived right on the water and who had the brunt of the wind. See, those that lived in the open areas along the water, they’re the ones who suffered, not only from wind, but from water, also. Where those of us who had lots of trees and away from the water, we didn’t have that problem.

**Stork:** What was that like for you, when you saw the waterfront and when you were hearing people’s stories, like in that first week?

**McDonald:** Well, it scared you at first. Most people who lost their homes had evacuated. People were encouraged to evacuate if they lived on the water or in low areas. And I don’t know how—I know that the police didn’t go door-to-door, knocking; however, if we had to, we were going to evacuate. I had already talked to the police about my wife’s sister not being able to evacuate, and they knew that she was on the list to be checked upon. But after doing a study of what we—and we’re not weathermen, but what we felt we should do; we made the decision to stay, and we’re glad that we made that decision.

**Bowen-Swan:** So are there any social networks, government agencies, or resource people that you have been drawing on since Hurricane Katrina?

**McDonald:** Not for myself. I’ve had Scout troops all over the United States to contact me, and we have disbursed camping gear and uniforms and money to various Scout troops all over South Mississippi, and still doing it.

**Stork:** So what did you say your role was as a Scout leader?

**McDonald:** I’m a Scoutmaster.

**Stork:** And what does that entail?

**McDonald:** It means that I’ve got a group of boys from age eleven to eighteen, and we do a lot of camping, outdoor experiences, lots of water activities. I’ve been a Scoutmaster for thirty-four years, and they have their—it’s just like, almost like the military. You have your rank advancement, and you have your leadership positions, and eventually if they stay long enough, they earn their Eagle Award, which is the top award in Scouting. And it’s a good program for developing leadership and citizenship.
Bowen-Swan: You know we have Scouts Canada, too, right?

McDonald: Oh, yes, yes, yes. I’ve been to National Jamborees and different things where we’ve had Canadian Scouts right there beside us.

Bowen-Swan: Do they have it for girls down here, too?

McDonald: We have Girl Scouts, yes, but they’re not as strong as Boy Scouts. And Boy Scouts are not that strong anymore, either, but we’ve had a troop here in Moss Point since 1919. We’re in an old, established troop in—

Bowen-Swan: I didn’t know Boy Scouts went back that far.

McDonald: Oh, yes. We go back to 1910. (laughter)

Stork: Cool!

Bowen-Swan: That’s great. We’re a Scout and Girl Guide family at our house, too.

McDonald: Well, my family is a big Scout family. In fact, I’m going this weekend to our big camp for an Indian, a fair event for the weekend.

Bowen-Swan: Nice. Hopefully, you’ll get good weather.

McDonald: Oh, they’re predicting bad weather. (laughter)

Bowen-Swan: Oh, no. That’ll teach them to be tough, I guess, eh?

McDonald: Yeah.

Bowen-Swan: So I just wanted to also ask what role did family, neighbors, club members or church members play in your efforts to reconnect after Hurricane Katrina?

McDonald: In the church, they had a telephone call thing that they contacted all members to find out—those they could contact. We attend church in Pascagoula, and we were one of the few families that did not have to move into a FEMA trailer, and there are still many people in FEMA trailers. But most of them are rebuilding to the standards that this probably will never happen again.

Bowen-Swan: The people that are living in the FEMA trailers, are they like all together in a park, or are they just beside their property?

McDonald: Most of them, those that I have had any dealings with, have them in their front yard or backyard. These FEMA trailers you see in parks where there are many, many of them are mostly people who were in apartment complexes and things like
that, where they couldn’t put a trailer. And I still have one Scout family that’s in a Scout trailer, and all the rest of them have moved back in their homes.

**Stork:** So is your church working together in some way? Like is there some— (laughter) I’m not sure what I’m asking exactly. After Katrina, is your church doing some kind of—helping all the members in the church together?

**McDonald:** Oh, yes. Oh, our church, Eastlawn Methodist, has been one of the centers for the volunteers to come to, and those volunteers, along with the church members, have gone out and gotten most of our families back into their homes. Not only that, but anyone who needs help, that came and said, “I need help,” the churches have gone out and done that. They’ve got the food kitchens. We had one set up here on the waterfront in Moss Point that we fed a thousand people a day, and it went on for weeks and weeks and weeks and weeks until people started getting back into their homes.

**Stork:** And where does that funding come from?

**McDonald:** From people all over the United States. You’d be surprised where. Sixteen-wheeler loads of stuff came in here from everywhere. You just can’t imagine the amount of food that came in here and clothing and materials to rebuild homes, Sheetrock, insulation. You know what [Habitat for] Humanity, where they build the houses for people? A lot of that is being done through churches right here. But Moss Point didn’t have that many homes destroyed.

**Stork:** Yeah, that’s what I’ve been hearing.

**McDonald:** We were one of the lucky communities. We lost none of our century-old homes, and we lost none of our six hundred century-old oak trees. And that’s what makes Moss Point, is its homes and its oak trees and people.

**Bowen-Swan:** So just about your work, tell me about your work before Hurricane Katrina.

**McDonald:** I’ve been retired for fourteen years.

**Bowen-Swan:** Oh, nice. (laughter) So I guess, then, you didn’t have to worry about—

**McDonald:** But I have never been busier in my life.

**Bowen-Swan:** Well, good. And what do you do? Like how do you fill your time?

**McDonald:** I’m a Scoutmaster; I’m a Master Naturalist; I am a genealogical volunteer at the library, and anything that comes along. I’m a member of the celebration, which does the Falderal. I’m a Rotarian. Oh, and I belong to a lot of
other environmental organizations that involve you, like the Audubon Society, the Land Trust, and I have, they tell me, a madness; I’m trying to preserve the cemeteries. I’m fighting a losing battle, but I’m making people aware that they have abandoned the past by not taking care of the cemeteries. And I’m working with a lady, and we are doing a book, which will be published within the next three months, of all the cemeteries in our county, and it tells who’s buried there and when. It’s a history in itself, and we’ve been working on it for twelve years. And we’re hoping through this that we’re going to make people aware that they have a responsibility to take care of the dead as well as the living because I hate to see the cemeteries done the way they are.

Bowen-Swan: And then, were your social networks, like your Boy Scouts and your naturalists, were all these networks and organizations still in place after Hurricane Katrina?

McDonald: Yes. Yes, here, we were not that way. Away from here, a few miles over, most of these groups were dispersed. They’re not back on their feet yet, but our structure was not damaged. So we’ve kept on going; we didn’t miss summer camp or anything, and a lot of people, you know, when your camp is destroyed and you’re able to help a camp, we still did what we were supposed to.

Bowen-Swan: Good, I’m glad it wasn’t too disruptive for you then.

McDonald: Our biggest problem is not having a grocery store.

Bowen-Swan: You still don’t have a grocery store right now in Moss Point here? You have to go to Pascagoula?

McDonald: We have to go to Wal-Mart, and just about all of South Mississippi does not have a chain of grocery stores like Piggly-Wiggly or Kroger’s. And we only have places like Wal-Mart, and you need variety. I’m not a Wal-Mart person. We have some other grocery stores, but with the number of people, it’s very difficult to get what you need. That has been the biggest problem is not having a grocery store.

Stork: Did you say you have any grandchildren?

McDonald: No. I have two god-sons, twelve-year-old twins.

Stork: How did they respond after Hurricane Katrina?

McDonald: They have really been great. They live in Ocean Springs. All the houses in front of them and to the right and behind them washed away. Their house was the only one that did not, and the ones that washed away kept theirs from not washing away. They evacuated to Vicksburg.

Bowen-Swan: To where?
McDonald: Vicksburg, Mississippi. You couldn’t get a motel this side of Atlanta if you wanted to. If you decided to evacuate, if you didn’t have relatives, you were in trouble. But anyway, they lost everything, and they were sent to school in Texas where they would not have their school year disrupted, not because of the school but because of not having a place to live. And they just got out of their FEMA trailer just recently, and they don’t know how to act in a house. They got so much space, now, and you know, it’s also the temperament. You notice temperament, where before they might not have been aggravated or aggravate you, but they’d had a problem with adjusting, living in that tiny trailer because there was five children and two adults in that small trailer.

Bowen-Swan: And they’re twelve years old; that’s got to be hard.

McDonald: And they’re twelve, the youngest one. They’ve had two birthdays since the storm, and they will remember the storm; however, they left for the storm. They did not experience what happened there. And they did not experience living in a place where people evacuated to, what I mean are large crowds. Those people that went into shelters where there were a hundred and two hundred people, that was a very unpleasant experience, and nobody ever wants to do it if they can avoid it.

Stork: So they went to Texas for the full year?

McDonald: They went for the school year; they had an aunt out there that said, “Send them to me. I don’t want them to experience living the way they have to live.” So their aunt took them in.

Bowen-Swan: OK. So just talking about rebuilding your community, what would you like to see in the rebuilding of your community and the Gulf Coast?

McDonald: Well, in our own community, they have a charrette. You know what a charrette is?

Bowen-Swan: No.

McDonald: It’s a plan. Areas that were flooded and would require new elevations, you know, the government is requiring you to build so high; they’re going to do a lot of making those spaces green spaces. It’s going to be more open areas downtown. Government buildings are going to be moved to elevations that will more than likely not flood. The satellite up there took a picture of all—I have a picture before the storm and one after the storm of my own house, and it showed what trees I had down. I have five acres in my yard, and they have maps that show all of this. And you can tell from those maps where your flood zones are. And if you build in them, FEMA requires you to build so many feet above that. Well, our government buildings are all going to move. We’ll have new facilities. Our recreation department, everything will move to higher ground. And then we will have more green spaces in the inner city.
Our big problem is lack of good lighting, street lights, drainage, things like this, which undoubtedly is going to take a long time to correct. But if they follow the charrette, Moss Point will be a beautiful place. The only thing I object to on the charrette is that they want to make our main street two-lane rather than four-lane. And I can see it being a traffic problem because our main street is one of the main thoroughfares for getting out into the county. And it’s also one of the evacuation routes. And when you’ve got a four-lane, you can move people out. But when you got two-lane, you can’t.

Bowen-Swan: And what’s the reason for moving it to two-lane?

McDonald: They say it will attract the Mom-and-Pop businesses back into the area, and improve the economy. But my personal opinion is that nobody’s going to stop when you’ve got a traffic problem; they’re going to go right on through. And if you got four lanes, they’re not going to stop anyway, so the business section needs to be where it is, along the highway. And if it’s four lanes, people are going to go to it, but if they have to fight to find a parking place or fight the traffic, they’re not going to go there. But that’s not quite the way it—(laughter) they don’t like my opinion about that anyway. It won’t bother me one way or the other, but I hate to see it done. I can live with it, but I’d rather it be more open, free traffic, moving, things like that.

Stork: What are your hopes and fears of the future?

McDonald: Well, I’m (laughter) a senior citizen, and I just hope that the City government can provide the services that we all need. They are not being provided now where it would make it easier for senior citizens to remain in the area. We don’t want to go to assisted-living places; we like to maintain our own homes, but we got to have services to be able to maintain, you know, be there.

Bowen-Swan: What kind of services?

McDonald: Well, grocery stores where you don’t have to drive eight or ten miles to a grocery store where you’ve got them within, say, a couple of blocks. You know, that’s the main thing is that type of service. Now, we’ve got post office and banks and utilities and things like that. You don’t have to worry. They’re going to come to you one way or the other, but getting food and transportation for elderly are the two big issues.

Stork: So what issues do you anticipate in rebuilding the city?

McDonald: That I will participate in or anticipate?

Stork: Anticipate.

McDonald: Well, I don’t know if I’ll live long enough to see anything really accomplished on what needs to be done. I guess I know one thing that is going to
come about is that we received money from a lawsuit to improve the drinking water here, and we’ve got a new system that’s going to be coming in within the next year. And that’ll improve the quality of water. And I think that would be the big thing that we’ll see done in the next couple of years.

Bowen-Swan: Did you say you made a lawsuit about the drinking water?

McDonald: There was a lawsuit; we had an industry here that pumped chemicals underground that destroyed, I guess you’d say——

Bowen-Swan: The groundwater?

McDonald: —the groundwater, or poisoned the groundwater, whatever you want to say. I’m not just sure what took place, but as a result of it, the City of Moss Point won a lawsuit where they’re putting in the system that’s going to purify all the drinking water where none of the impurities or chemicals will be in that and be a much better water system that what we have.

Stork: So in an ideal world, how would you like to see your community rebuilt?

McDonald: I’d like to see it be a community of friendly people, which we really do have, but I’d like for it to be known as a great place to live, that people would want to come and visit us. And we’re going that route; we’re going that route. With the Audubon Center here now, the only one on the Gulf Coast from Miami to Texas, it’s going to bring in a lot of tourists. We’ve got a lot of ecotourism being planned, and I think that’s the future of our area is having people who come here and look at our nature. We got boat tours that will take people out through the river and the marsh to look at the wildlife and things. We’ll have walking trails; we’ve got the downtown area where you’ve got your piers. People just flock there to fish now, and it’s so pretty at night. We’ve got the things, and it’s slowly materializing.

Stork: How do we preserve the strengths of our communities while addressing the challenges?

McDonald: Now, I did not understand a word that you said. (laughter)

Stork: How do we preserve the strengths of our communities while addressing the challenges?

McDonald: And that is the biggest challenge that we have. I am on the Historical Preservation Commission for the City of Moss Point. The opposition to preserving history will blow your mind. The number of people and government officials who do not want to preserve the past in order to use it for the future—and that’s the biggest problem that I’m facing because I’m on that commission, and I’m fighting to get the old protected for the future.
Bowen-Swan: I know that you’re saying that you’re working towards getting the cemeteries protected. Like what other kind of historical things would you like to see protected?

McDonald: We have over a hundred century-old homes; those need to be into a historical district. There are government grants and state grants that’s available to help people preserve those places, and it’s a tax break for those who own it and preserve it. People don’t understand these things. That type of thing I want done. We’re working on it; we’re working on it. But educating people to the way that you’d like for them to be educated is hard because everybody has their own opinion about everything. And if you don’t understand anything, you’re going to be opposed to it. And that’s the biggest problem is understanding what needs to be done. And it’s not easy to convince people.

Bowen-Swan: So when Hurricane Camille, a Category Five storm, slammed into the Mississippi Gulf Coast in 1969, were you living here at that time? And if so, how would it compare to Katrina?

McDonald: I was living here. The knowledge of what the storm could do, we did not know. We had less communications. Comparing the amount of damage done, virtually Moss Point had none, other than some limbs and trees and things like that. But as far as homes destroyed, I can’t recall anyone having a home destroyed in our area from Camille. Now, I worked for the shipyard at that time. We had probably about seven feet of water in most of our buildings down there because we’re right on the river. Other than the economy, in fact, in paychecks, that was a big thing that we noticed from Camille. The second thing is, we did not have the volunteers to come in for Camille, nor did we have the relief organization that came in with their soup kitchens and things like this. You didn’t have that. The area over across the Bay in Biloxi and Gulfport were badly hurt by Camille. We had a lot of people that drowned because they didn’t evacuate or couldn’t evacuate, lack of transportation. You didn’t have the constant thing saying, “The storm is coming; the storm is coming.”

Bowen-Swan: Like TV and radio, you mean?

McDonald: Right. You just didn’t have it. So with Katrina, we had—damagewise, we had probably a thousand times more damage done in Moss Point than we ever had from the other storms.

Bowen-Swan: Camille affected Moss Point a lot less than Katrina?

McDonald: We had very little impact from Camille, very little. We had limbs down, shingles off, but we didn’t have any water in the houses, didn’t have any houses destroyed. We were without electricity a long time, but the grocery stores were not impacted. The drug stores, none of your businesses were except your industry right along the water where you had to clean up areas. Other than that, there was no impact. But now if you went inland, there was a lot of impact from Camille, just like it was for
Katrina. The towns that are, like my hometown. I’d say half of the homes up there had to have—their roofs and things were blown off where my area, on my side, we didn’t have that. We had a lot of people got wet because of shingles and things, but they didn’t lose a roof. They lost shingles. But the water, rising water was a problem in Katrina. It was not a problem in the other storm. We’ve had worse storms here than that one. (laughter)

Bowen-Swan: Yeah? Which one?

McDonald: [Hurricane] Frederic.

Bowen-Swan: Frederic? When was that?

McDonald: Oh, probably in [19]92 or [19]93. We had more trees down, more limbs down, a lot more to clean up. Not house damage, but cleaning up. And then we had Hurricane Georges when we had rainwater. We had ten inches of rain, and that flooded a lot of areas, but it didn’t get into houses; it just saturated the land. But Moss Point, I consider it very lucky, very, very lucky from this past storm. The part of Moss Point that you see was not hurt that bad. What is called Creole and Escatawpa, 95 percent of the people had water in their homes, where probably only 20 percent had water in the rest of Moss Point because the water came across the lake, and the wind blew it that way. And the elevation here is a lot higher than the elevation across the river.

Bowen-Swan: Is there anything else that you’d like to tell us about your Hurricane Katrina experience?

McDonald: I just hope that we don’t have another one.

Bowen-Swan: Is that something that you fear?

McDonald: No.

Bowen-Swan: No.

McDonald: You can’t fear something like that. You can dread it, but don’t let fear—because if you have fear, then you can’t perform. You might get scared after it’s all over with, but you can’t show your fear until it’s—I just think that fear is the worst thing in the world for you.

Stork: OK. Could you tell us a little bit about your childhood, maybe what a typical day would be like for you?

McDonald: Well, I grew up on a small farm where I was the number four of six children, and we’re scattered over a long time of years. And we lived where we had grandparents and great-grandparents, and everybody was either aunt or uncle or
cousin. So you had a lot of mamas and papas. We had a lot of freedom; we had beautiful woods to ramble. We could ramble to our heart’s content. We knew where every fruit tree was, every nut tree. We had great swimming holes; we didn’t have a lot of restrictions as far as our roaming as long as we listened for a bell. My mother had a bell that she’d get out and ring, and we knew that we had to be home within fifteen minutes, and that was her way of communicating with us. My dad worked away from home, and so my mom was boss. But we had a very large home, and we had a maid, a cook, and a lady that did the washing and ironing.

**Stork:** So you didn’t really have many chores then.

**McDonald:** We had to feed the pigs and the cows and chickens, and we had to maintain a garden. And every Saturday we were marched to one of the—we have three family cemeteries. We were marched by my grandmother to one of the cemeteries, and we’d take care of whatever needed to be done at the cemeteries. And we loved to go to our grandmother’s because she was a great storyteller. And she could make sweet things out of nothing; she always treated you to something. And I had a great-grandmother living there that I was scared to death of.

**Stork:** Why were you scared of her?

**McDonald:** She was mean to us. She didn’t like children. She was old, old, and we irritated her. (laughter) And we had a lot of black families that lived on our farm, and our actual playmates were all black children. We had very few white children in our area. And it just—

**Stork:** What kind of a farm was it?

**McDonald:** We had a few pigs, a few cows; we raised a few acres of corn to feed things. Not a farm for the purpose of making a living. My uncle’s farm that was adjacent to our place, he grew hybrid seed corn, and we grew some on our farm, but not much. And we had tung oil trees; I don’t know if you know what tung oil trees are. We had acres and acres of those; they got the nuts and from that they make a liquid that went into paints. And then we had large pecan orchards and grape scuppernong orchards and things like that. We had a lot of things like that to do. And my great, great-grandfather had settled there, and he owned twelve sections of land; that’s twelve square miles of land. And everybody within that twelve square miles was cousins. So it was a family community, and it’s still that way today. We still maintain my mother’s home and my grandmother’s home because they’re old, old homes, and we try to keep them.

**Bowen-Swan:** Do you still own the same farm?

**McDonald:** We still have the same land; some of the family does. Yeah.

**Bowen-Swan:** OK. Yeah, nice.
McDonald: They’re all still relatives up there. Yeah.

Bowen-Swan: Is that far from here?

McDonald: It’s about an hour’s drive.

Bowen-Swan: An hour. OK.

McDonald: I have two sisters that live there, and I have a brother that’s in a nursing home in Hattiesburg. He’s a 100-percent-disabled war veteran, and he has to be taken care of.

Bowen-Swan: From the Vietnam War?

McDonald: No, the Korean Conflict. And that was another concern of mine during the storm. The government ordered that all veterans, disabled veterans be moved three days before the storm to facilities upstate. And he’s in a very delicate situation, and they didn’t take the best care of him. So we had a hard time after the storm when he had gotten back, getting him back to where he was fairly comfortable. So it seemed like that they were not prepared as well as they needed to be; however, a lot has been done to improve that type of problem. But before the storm hit here, I had to find where he was, where I could find out what was going on. And I had to find out what my sisters were going to do because they had experienced Camille, and they had always said they wouldn’t stay there if another Camille came. I have a first cousin that lived in Long Beach in a condominium, and she left there and went into Lumberton. She lost everything. Her condominium, the only thing she found was her husband’s wedding band, and so she’s relocated to Florence, Alabama, which is four hundred miles inland. And she’d lived on the Coast all her life, but she said she wouldn’t come back. And that’s happening to a lot of people. Even here, many of our families have moved inland to where they’re not near water. That’s the big thing I didn’t tell you; the loss of the young people is what’s going to hurt this community and the county, moving inland, because there are no children left here. And it’s even worse in Pascagoula. New Orleans has lost a third of its population, and they’re not going to go back. I wouldn’t go back either. If you’ve ever been to New Orleans, that’s below sea level. They had no hopes down there, but at least we’re above flood areas. It’s an abnormal—my wife’s family has been here since 1815, and this was the second time that we’ve ever had water. So it’s no worse than having a blizzard. You know, you have some bad ones up there because I was in Michigan when a blizzard came through, and you could touch a tree like that, and it’d break and fall over if they were frozen solid. And even when I was a student at New York University, I was in a storm up there, a snow storm. That was worse to me than anything (laughter) I’ve ever been in because I can dress down here for the weather, but I didn’t know how to dress for weather up there.

Bowen-Swan: Sometimes you can’t dress for it, you know? (laughter)
Stork: Oh, yeah, you can. (laughter)

McDonald: I’ve enjoyed talking to you young ladies.

Bowen-Swan: Me, too. Thank you very much.

Stork: Yeah. Thanks so much for doing this interview.

(end of interview)